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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6604
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 001367

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SUBJECT: MINISTER KRISHNA'S EXTERNAL AFFAIRS TEAM

REF: NEW DELHI 1225

11. (U) SUMMARY: Rounding out the new Minister of External Affairs team headed by S.M. Krishna (Ref A), Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appointed Preneet Kaur and Shashi Tharoor as Ministers of State. Tharoor's extensive foreign policy background and savvy media image are expected to lend clout to the MEA, while Preneet Kaur's appointment is largely seen as a reward to the Congress Party's Punjab base. While portfolios are still fluid, media reports that Tharoor will focus on matters relating to Arabian Gulf countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, West Asia, Africa, and consular services, while Kaur will be responsible for Eurasia, Western and Central Europe, and East Asia. (The United States, Russia, Germany, France, China, and Japan will stay in Krishna's dossier.) On June 30, Nirupama Rao was appointed Foreign Secretary (SepTel to follow). END SUMMARY

From Veteran Diplomat to Novice Politician

12. (SBU) Tharoor's meteoric rise through the ranks of the United Nations, from entry-level officer to the rank of Under Secretary General, culminated in his unsuccessful run as India's candidate for Secretary General in 2006. (Note: Media reports and popular perception in India regard the United States as thwarting his bid for Secretary General. End Note.) The polished and articulate Tharoor dealt extensively with the international press and was a regular conduit for Secretary General Kofi Annan to the editorial boards of worldwide media outlets. As the Under Secretary General for Information, he was often referred to as a "one-man policy planning operation" while focusing on strategic goals for the U.N.

13. (SBU) Although Tharoor describes himself as pro-western and sympathetic to the U.S., personal interactions suggest some ambivalence. Tharoor claims ties with U.S. figures, including the Secretary. (Note: He has mentioned to PolOffs his attendance at the Renaissance Weekends sponsored by former President Bill Clinton. End Note.) Tharoor supposedly maintains close ties to Israel, which electoral opponents spun negatively during his Lok Sabha campaign.

14. (U) Tharoor's unexpected electoral victory to the 15th Lok

Sabha from Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), Kerala, marked the beginning of his political career. Viewed as an outsider to Indian politics, Tharoor was scrutinized for his Western mannerisms and lack of fluency in Malayalam, the native language of Kerala.

¶5. (U) Nevertheless, Tharoor managed to mobilize support by marketing himself as a candidate whose western education and experience would benefit the electorate. In conversations with PolOffs, Tharoor stated that he was conversant enough in Malayalam to understand people's problems and that his command of English and Hindi would allow him to successfully advocate for his constituency in New Delhi. Tharoor won 45% of the vote in a tough four-way race, trumping the leading challenger from the Communist Party of India by about 100,000 votes.

¶6. (SBU) Tharoor's political website and his use of new media technologies in his campaign (including emails, voice SMS, and the use of social networking websites Facebook and Twitter) was novel for political campaigns in India. Contacts at the MEA report that Tharoor's Twitter feed has ruffled feathers the MEA. Tharoor wrote about portfolio re-assignments after a meeting with Minister Krishna on Twitter, contradicting the MEA's prior press release. One MEA contact remarked "I don't understand why he needs a virtual entourage. He is a real minister now! He has a real entourage!" Despite his brief time in politics, media analysts speculate that he has higher political ambitions. Tharoor's non-ideological approach and ambitious public

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persona irk others in his party who see him as an outsider who frequently acts unilaterally.

Tharoor's Personal Biography

¶7. (U) Born in London in 1956, Tharoor was educated in India at the prestigious St. Stephen's College, and the United States, completing a Ph.D. in 1978 at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at the age of 22, a school record. He is an award-winning author of fiction and non-fiction, as well as an active speaker on Indian political, economic, and social issues. He is married to Christa Giles, a Canadian Deputy Secretary at the United Nations Disarmament Commission. He has twin sons with his first wife Tilottama; both attended Yale University. An eloquent speaker, Tharoor is fluent in English, French, Hindi, and Spanish, and can speak conversational Malayalam. Tharoor comes from the elite Nair caste of Kerala State.

Preneet Kaur, An Outstanding Public Servant

¶8. (U) Prime Minister Singh appointed Preneet Kaur Minister of State for External Affairs after her election to a third-term in the 15th Lok Sabha. Kaur represents the Patiala constituency in Punjab. Kaur is part of Punjab's political elite: both her father, Gyan Singh Kahlon, and husband, Captain Amrinder Singh, are former Chief Ministers of Punjab. Kaur has an outstanding reputation as a modest and honest politician dedicated to public service.

¶9. (U) Kaur's consecutive elections to the Lok Sabha since 1999 are notable in Punjab since very few politicians are re-elected due to recurring corruption allegations. Kaur hails from the former Patiala royal family and is credited with the successful clean-up campaign in Patiala. Known as the Maharani of Patiala in the popular press, Kaur spearheads development initiatives in her constituency and is regarded as responsive to voter needs. Her record includes serving on parliamentary committees like those on Empowerment of Women and Public Undertakings. Kaur also serves as President of the Citizen Welfare Council in Patiala and the Chairperson of

the State Committee on Female Feticide.

Kaur's Personal Biography

¶10. (U) Kaur was born on October 3, 1944, in Himachal Pradesh. Her father, Gyan Kahlon, was an influential Congress Party leader in Punjab who rose to the position of Chief Minister. She earned a Bachelor's degree and Teachers Training Certificate from St. Bedes College and the Convent of Jesus and Mary College in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. Kaur married Captain Amrinder Singh in 1964; they have two children. She is an avid golfer and is the Chairperson of the Patiala Polo and Riding Club. She speaks Hindi, Punjabi and English.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) Neither Shashi Tharoor nor Preneet Kaur occupied the spotlight in Indian politics until assuming the position of State Minister for External Affairs. Tharoor's strong diplomatic credentials and personal ambition make him a solid addition to S.M. Krishna's team. His vast UN experience will likely be tapped as India continues its push for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Kaur's foreign policy credentials fall short of Tharoor's due to her limited experience in foreign affairs. However, her elite background, outstanding record of service, and knowledge of cultural and social issues are her strengths. Krishna does not have the depth of experience as his predecessor, Pranab Mukherjee, so the Ministers of State may play a more

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prominent role. Nevertheless, PM Singh and National Security Advisor Narayanan will have the last word on major policy decisions regardless of the makeup of high-level officials in the External Affairs Ministry (Ref A). END COMMENT
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